Zoot Suit Worksheet

1. Describe the *stasis* in the play: where, when, who, what, etc. in a paragraph.

This play is set in the early 1940s during WWII. It centers on the Mexican-American community in LA, California, and specifically Henry, a young gang leader.

2. What is the *intrusion*?

The intrusion occurs when the LAPD come to the Sleepy Lagoon and arrest Henry along with his friends for the murder of another young Mexican-American.

3. What is the *unique factor*?

“Now is the time when…” authorities are worried about “traitors and spies” since WWII broke out. They are anxious to pin the city’s troubles on the Mexican-American community.

4. What is the *dramatic question* that should be answered by the end of the play?

Specifically to the play, the dramatic question would be if Henry and his friends will be released. More widely, it would be if the American and Mexican-American citizens of LA can overcome their racial hatred for each other.

5. Identify the most *theatrical moment* in the play and of what importance it seems to be.

I found the most theatrical moment to be in the court room as the prosecution was questioning the young lady (who’s name I forget…). He was asking leading questions and screaming at the women on the stand, forcing her to say things she didn't mean and extrapolating untrue testimony from her. This scene was so important because it revealed the bias of the legal system against the Mexican-American community and set up reasons why Henry’s case could be appealed.

6. List some of the *themes* of the play.

* unjust lawyers and judges rigging trial results
* old family traditions compared to modern popular ideas
* can clothing define who people are?
* the opposition between lighthearted dancing and bloody fights

7. What does Henry want? How does the playwright resolve his wants at the end of the play? How does this resolution compare with the real Henry, as indicated in the documentary?

Throughout the play, Henry wants to join the navy, but more importantly, he wants to honor his Hispanic heritage. Since he now has a record, he cannot join the navy. At the end of the play, however, we see Henry welcomed back into his family and embracing the Chicano way of life even more firmly. The real Henry went in and out of prison, started taking heavy drugs, and died in a bar in the 70s. This is a rather sad and anti-climactic end for a person so important to the soot suit riots. By ending the play with people’s impressions of Henry, the playwright honored Henry’s convictions and ended the play hopefully.

8. Note which version of the play in production you saw (either the DVD version or the HS stage version), then discuss the way the designers move from place to place (scene to scene) and how effectively that is for communicating the dramatic action.

I watched the High School production (and was extremely impressed!!). In this play, the “Alter-ego” as I will call him played a big part in keeping the action going. Often, he would snap his fingers, and the scene would quickly shift, or he would draw Henry to another time. The designers also made use of dramatic blackouts that would come suddenly and leave the audience startled and wanting to know what happens next. These two methods were particularly effective for keeping the action moving within the play.

9. Choose a character from the play and discuss how the costume designer has accentuated (focused) the audience attention on that character. What are some of the details of the costume that strike you as interesting or exaggerated.

Henry’s girlfriend, whose name I still forget, is dressed in a very conservative dress comported to the other Mexican-American dancers. It is knee length, not overly fitted, and she wears her hair down in curls. This sets her apart from the other women Henry brags about having dated and suggests that she might be looking for a permanent relationship. She stays with Henry’s parents while he is in prison and looks the same when he gets out. Even though so much has changed in Henry’s life, she has not, and their love for each other hasn't either.

10. Lighting plays a big role in the DVD and the staged version by the HS. Discuss the use of light to accentuate characters and scenes, choosing a particular scene from the production to discuss.

The lighting in this play was used to emphasize dramatic moments in the story. For a good portion of the production, there was a gentle rolling sunset projected on the back scrim. This helped set the play in LA and gave a nod to the Mexican-Americans’ use of bright, vibrant colors. Then, when the audience was meant to focus all its attention on one person, a strong spotlight would appear on that character. Though this is very theatrical, it worked well in the court room scene when the witnesses were being closely examined. The scene that made the best use of lighting I think was when the “Alter-ego” steps into the fight with the sailors, and they beat him and strip him of his pristine soot suit. The set turns completely red, and all we can see is Henry and his mysterious friend changing places, their silhouettes showing up sharply against the red scrim.